

ANABAPTIST MARTYRS

May 13, 2003 (David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

The following is excerpted from *The Story of the Baptists in All Ages and Countries* by Richard B.Cook, 1888:

There were many Anabaptists, who suffered for the truth's sake at the hands of Papists and Protestants in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. In the Martyrs' Mirror, and the Baptist Martyrology, there are hundreds of cases recorded.

In all of these places the persecutions were legalized both by civil enactment, and by ecclesiastical sanction. In Germany, by the edict of King Ferdinand in 1527, death was the penalty for Anabaptism. The Emperor Charles V. caused them to be hunted down and put to death. In 1529, at the Diet of Spire, it was ordained that death should be visited upon every Anabaptist. There also met at Homburg in 1536, a Diet composed of the Reformers of Germany and their followers in church and state. Luther and Melancthon were among the number. That body sanctioned the punishment of Anabaptists, even by death, by the civil authorities.

At the beginning of the Reformation, the first to suffer martyrdom in Germany were Hans Koch, and Leonard Meyster, who were put to death at Augsburg in 1524. They were said to have been descendants of the Bohemian and Moravian Waldenses, and were placed at the head of the list of Anabaptist martyrs.

Michael Satler, who had been a monk, was put to death in 1527, for uniting with the Anabaptists, and marrying a wife. He was executed in a most barbarous manner. His tongue was cut out, his flesh torn with red hot pincers and his body finally burned.

Leonard Schoener, a barefooted monk, growing disgusted with the hypocrisy and wantonness of the monastic orders, became an Anabaptist under the ministry of Hubmeyer. He was an educated man. Having preached throughout Bavaria, he was beheaded, and then burnt at Rottenburg, in 1528.

Hans Schloffer was tortured with great cruelty, and questioned by the priest upon the subject of infant baptism, he answered, "that we must first preach the word, and baptize those only who hear, understand, and believe and receive it. This is true Christian baptism and no infant baptism. The Lord has nowhere commanded to baptize infants."

At Alzey there was a wholesale slaughter of Anabaptists in 1529. Three hundred and fifty were confined in prison and literally dealt out to the executioner like sheep to the slaughter, as fast as the executioner could dispatch them. In whose body, then, was the cruel soul of Nana Sahib? Those

who were waiting their turn to die, sang until the executioner came for them. It was at this same place--Alzey--that nine brethren and three sisters were imprisoned, and when they refused to renounce their faith, were put to death, the men by the sword and the woman by drowning. A sister came to comfort the female prisoners while they were yet in prison and exhorted them to be true and firm, despite their sufferings, and for the sake of the eternal joy to come to them. For this visit--for comforting and strengthening these suffering saints--she was burned to death.

Two young girls were arrested at Bamberg, shortly after their baptism, and after being cruelly tortured to make them recant, were burned to death. While going to the stake their tormentors put upon their heads, in derision, crowns of twisted straw, when one of the girls said to her companion: "Our Saviour wore a crown of thorns for us, and shall not we wear these harmless crowns for him? and, besides, we shall soon be crowned by him with glorious crowns of gold."

Among many Christians condemned to be burned at Saltzburg, there was a young and beautiful girl of sixteen. Even the hearts of her persecutors were moved, and after vainly trying to persuade her to recant, the executioner took her in his arms to a trough for watering horses, that was near by, and thrusting her head under the water, held it there until she was dead.

Wolfgang Brand-Hueber was an Anabaptist preacher, who was put to death at Lintz. This was one hundred years before Roger Williams' celebrated proclamation of civil and religious liberty in Rhode Island, and yet this martyr expressed the same sentiments when he taught that obedience and submission should be rendered to magistrates in all things not contrary to God. This has ever been Baptist belief. And to this day, there is not full liberty in Germany for our brethren.

The Anabaptists appeared in **Switzerland** in 1523. According to Erasmus, they were numerous there in 1529. [Orchard's Foreign Baptists, p. 346.] They suffered there at the hands of the Reformed. The first decree against them imposing a fine, was passed by the Senate at Zurich, one of the Cantons, in 1525. In 1526, another decree was passed, making the penalty for Anabaptism--death. It forbade believers' baptism, and compelled the baptism of infants. And these laws were made with the full approbation of the reformers, who were intensely active in securing their execution. And yet, Bullinger, one of the reformers, testifies; "For the people said, 'Let others say what they will of the Dippers, we see in them nothing but what is excellent, and hear from them nothing else but that we should not swear, or do wrong to any one, that every one ought to do what is right, that every one must live godly and holy lives, We see no wickedness in them.'" [Martyrology.]

Still, for a long period, the persecutions continued throughout all Switzerland, which so far from checking Anabaptism, seemed to stimulate its growth. It was either, go to the Reformed Church, or die. They preferred death. Here are a few instances out of the many.

Balthazar Hubmeyer was one of the most distinguished Anabaptists who felt the severity of the laws and the persecuting spirit of the Swiss reformers. Hubmeyer was a learned and eloquent Catholic priest, and was called Doctor, by the Romanists. He was born in Bavaria, in 1480. In 1516,

we find him preaching in the cathedral at Ratisbon to great crowds of people, at which time he began to take sides with the reformers, preaching against many Romish errors. He soon fully embraced the Reformed doctrines and practices, and became the friend of the Swiss reformers, and with Zwingli, lived in the most intimate intercourse. He had translated the Gospels and the Epistles into the language of the German people, to whom he now also preached the gospel. He came, finally, to regard infant baptism as a popular error and renounced it. After pleading in vain with his friend Zwingli, and his associates to do the same, he was baptized, with over one hundred others, by William Roubli.

Hubmeyer, himself, soon after baptized three hundred upon profession of their faith. He was seized and imprisoned at Zurich. It was said by his enemies that he recanted, but on one occasion when a large concourse of people were collected in the great church by the leaders, and Zwingli and his companions were there to hear the recantation, he disappointed them. They waited in breathless silence to hear him condemn Anabaptism. When he did break the silence with his voice, it was to re-assert that infant baptism was without the authority of God. His voice was drowned in the uproar of the horrified people, and above the din was heard the voice of Zwingli. They had argued with him in prison, and (these Protestant reformers!) had even applied the tortures of the rack, to convince him that he was wrong, but he would not deny the truth, so he was hurried back to prison. It is said that he made a recantation afterwards, and was released from prison, but he was still confined to the city of Zurich, from which he soon escaped. He was not long allowed the liberty of preaching Christ, for he was again arrested, and taken to Vienna, where he was burned to death, March 10, 1528; and at the same time his devoted wife was drowned in the Danube, by the same un pitying hands. His last words were, "With joy I die that I may come to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." His wife urged him to constancy. He has left many writings to live after him.

Previous to the execution of Hubmeyer, **Felix Mantz**, a native of Zurich was drowned at that city. This was in 1527. Like Hubmeyer, he was at one time a friend of the Swiss reformers, but when he began to preach to crowds upon the unscripturalness of infant baptism and an unregenerated church membership, and to baptize believers, he was imprisoned by them. His last words were, "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."

Louis Hetzer was another intimate friend of Zwingli, until he adopted Anabaptist principles. He translated a portion of the Scriptures. He was beheaded at Constance in 1529. His death was glorious. Even his enemies were surprised at his calmness, his charity, his courage, his faith, and remarked, never was there such a death seen at Constance.

Many more cases of oppression and cruelty could be related. The effort was to exterminate. Even as late as 1671, seven hundred persons, homeless and destitute, were driven out of Berne. Great was the suffering of old and young.

From Switzerland, the Anabaptists fled in great numbers to the Netherlands, to escape persecution. Previously (1510) great numbers passed into Holland and the Netherlands and coalesced with the

Dutch Baptists. Papist and Protestant persecuted them there as elsewhere. [Orchard's Foreign Baptists, p. 330]

The Emperor Charles V., (1535,) and his son and successor, Philip II. of Spain (1556,) issued their imperial bloody edicts, against them, and the terrible Spanish Inquisition was brought, at length, to help the magistrate to discover and punish the so-called heresy.

The Lord soon raised up for them, in the country of their adoption, a leader in **Menno Simon**, from whom they have been given the name of Mennonites, and by whose labors they were greatly increased in numbers. He was born in the year 1492, at Witmarsum, Friesland. He was, at first, a Catholic priest and preached in his native village, was a man of great ability, and, evidently, of extensive learning. He was then ignorant of the Scriptures, however, and knew nothing of experimental religion. When first awakened to the errors of popery, and upon searching, was unable to find infant baptism in the Scriptures; he went to Luther and to other reformers for conference, but they gave him no light. He united with an Anabaptist church, in 1536, and retired from public life, but his brethren recognizing his humility and talents, brought him forward as a leader and teacher among them. At their earnest solicitation, and his own feeling, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel," he gave himself up to the work of the gospel ministry, knowing full well that bonds and imprisonments awaited him.

"From the commencement of his ministry among the German Anabaptists, to the end of his days, that is, during the space of twenty-five years, he traveled from one country to another, with wife and children, exercising his ministry under pressures and calamities of various kinds, that succeeded each other without interruption, and constantly exposed to the danger of falling a victim to the severity of the laws. East and West Friesland, together with the province of Groningen, were first visited by this zealous apostle of the Anabaptists; from thence he directed his course into Holland, Gelderland, Brabant, and Westphalia, continued it through the German provinces that lie on the coast of the Baltic Sea, and penetrated as far as Lavonia. In all these places his ministerial labors were attended with remarkable success, and a large number of believers were added to the church. Hence, he is deservedly looked upon as the common chief of almost all the Anabaptists, and the parent of that body that still subsists under that denomination. The success of this missionary will not appear surprising to those who are acquainted with his character, his spirit and talents, and who have a just notion of the condition of the Anabaptists at the period of time now under consideration." [Mosheim's Church History]

The martyrdom of Sicke Snyder was the means of awakening Menno, himself. "He was beheaded in Lewarden, in 1531. The constancy of this man to his views of believers' baptism, preferring even an ignominious death to renouncing his sentiments, led Menno to inquire into the subject of baptism. Menno could not find infant baptism in the Bible; and on consulting a minister of that persuasion, a concession was made that it had no foundation in the Bible. Not willing to yield, he consulted other celebrated reformers, but all these he found to be at variance, as to the grounds of the practice, consequently he became confirmed that the Baptists were suffering for truth's sake. In studying the word, convictions of sinfulness, and of his lost condition became deepened; and he

found God required sincerity and decision. He now sought new spiritual friends, and found some with whom he, at first, privately associated, but afterwards became one of their community." [Orchard's Foreign Baptists, p. 342.]

In 1539, when pursued by enemies, Menno took refuge in the house of his friend and brother Tiaert Keynerts. Menno escaped but his friend was arrested. It was a capital offence to give shelter to a heretic, in those days. He was cruelly tortured to make him reveal where Menno was concealed, but he refused to tell, and died for his brother.

In 1543, Menno was hunted through all West Friesland and a price was set upon his head. Even malefactors and murderers were offered pardon, the freedom of the country, the favor of the emperor, and a hundred carlgulden to deliver him to the criminal judge. On one occasion, a traitor had promised, for a certain sum of money, to deliver him to his enemies. He tried to betray him at a meeting, but Menno escaped in a wonderful manner. Not long after, the traitor with an officer, and in search of Menno, passed him in a boat on a canal. The traitor said not a word, but let him pass on to some distance, and escape upon shore. Then he exclaimed, "The bird has escaped us." "Why," said the officer, "did you not inform us?" "I could not speak," said the man, "for my tongue was tied." Whereupon the officer, calling him a villain, severely punished him.

By the kind intervention of Providence, he was permitted to escape the vigilance of his pursuers and finally, to die in peace. A kind nobleman, the lord of Fresenburg, Holstein, beholding the sufferings of the Anabaptists, and observing the true nobility of their character, invited them to settle upon his estates, where he would extend to them his protection. Many accepted his generous offer, and before long whole churches were living there in prosperity and peace. Here, Menno lived the latter part of his life, sending into the countries around the written word of life, and here he died, January 13th, 1559.

Anneken Von de Dove was an Anabaptist and was buried alive at Brussels, in 1597. The high court, in company with some Jesuits, (members of the so-called Catholic Society of Jesus,) went with her to the hole dug outside of the city. When they had covered her lower extremities with earth, the Jesuits called upon her to recant. She refused to deny her Lord, so the work went on, they still calling upon her to renounce her faith, until they threw the earth upon her face, and heaped it over her head and finally with deadly hate stamped upon it with their feet.

The time came, however, when civil liberty was granted the Anabaptists in the Netherlands. They found a friend in William, Prince of Orange, "the glorious founder of Belgic liberty." [Mosheim's Church History.] He resolutely stood out against all meddling with men's consciences, or inquiring into their thoughts. While smiting the Spanish Inquisition into the dust, he would have no Calvinistic Inquisition set up in its place. Earnestly a convert to the Reformed religion, but hating and denouncing only what was corrupt in the ancient church, he would not force men, with fire and sword, to travel to heaven upon his own road." [Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, II. pp. 362, 206]

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